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## PRISON LABOR ON PUBLIC ROADS

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BY THOMAS J. TYNAN,

Warden, Colorado State Penitentiary, Canon City, Col.

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Colorado owes many of its wonderful thoroughfares and scenic beauties to the men who are housed in the gray prison at Canon City. The highway to the top of the Royal Gorge, the skyline drive, the new Santa Fé trail, and others—always a source of wonder and delight to thousands of visitors—are but the triumphant vindication of the “honor system” of working convicts on state highways, exemplified in Colorado. This system has revolutionized penology and has demonstrated that through it the greatest good from financial, commercial and industrial vantage points can be gained for the community, as well as for the reformation and reclamation of the criminal element. Splendid highways have been shot through mountain fastnesses, splendid manhood has been made from degraded, sullen and vicious men, and this has only been possible through a system founded on appeal to the best in man.

Convict labor on highways, as practised in Colorado, Oregon, New Mexico, Wyoming, Arizona and Utah, is more or less of a new feature. It is not to be confounded with the southern “contract” camps, where men are sold at auction to the highest bidder. From an economical standpoint, it has been a tremendous saving to the taxpayers of the state, and has given them roads equal to any in the world. From a reformatory standpoint, it has been a still greater saving to society in lessened criminality, to the men themselves in increased self-respect, stamina of character and an added sense of reliability.

The first convict road camp was started in 1908. The work progressed slowly, and entirely too much attention was paid to the safe-keeping of the men at work. A short time after my induction into office as warden of the Colorado State Penitentiary, we enlarged upon the honor system, increasing the number of camps, eliminating every vestige of armed guards and placed these men solely upon their honor, with the result that more than triple the quantity of work was performed. The men worked with an energy and a zeal that have never before been equaled; they worked so

because they felt they were working for themselves, to retain the precious privilege of sunshine, outdoor work and the additional ten days a month that the road work permits to be deducted from their sentence, in addition to the good time allowed by law for good behavior. The camps are modern, sanitary and with no sign of physical restraint usually associated with prison life. The men pledged their word of honor and splendidly maintained it, establishing a standard of morals in the criminal world that has disproved the denunciations that the system was anarchistic, dangerous and foolhardy. The road camps are the hope of every man in the prison. The men are decently clothed in blue or khaki, they are better fed, work eight hours per day, and on Sundays their time is their own to fish, swim, play ball, listen to the phonographs or otherwise amuse themselves.

By working convicts on public highways, we have saved the state many thousand dollars, and the taxpayers have received the benefit of this tremendous saving. To give an idea of the great saving to the state, I wish to quote a few figures, based on actual facts. During the years 1909-10 we built fifty-seven miles of finished roadway, much of which had to be blasted out of solid rock, at a saving to the taxpayers of the state of over \$160,000.

During the years 1911-12 we built 157 miles of finished roadway at a total cost of \$46,805.44, or at a cost of \$298.12 per mile, saving the taxpayers of Colorado \$223,479.56 in actual cash. The above figures are based on contractors' estimates. The cost to maintain these men was just thirty-two cents per day per man. Not only are they building good, substantial roads, but also, under competent overseers, they are obtaining a knowledge and physical condition that will enable them to earn honest livelihoods when they are released from this institution.

During the past four years we have had over eighteen hundred individual men working in our honor camps. These men without guards, some fifty and one hundred, and even three hundred miles away from the prison, have created a national reputation for loyalty. Only a little over one in every one hundred men has violated his pledge not to run away, which is far less than the desertions from the United States army or navy; and communities have come to feel as safe near our prison road camps as they would anywhere.

To my mind, there is no reason why convict labor should not be disposed of in every state in the Union, just as it is in the states mentioned above, and by eliminating the factory system from our penal institutions and putting the ban on the convict-lease system, we will have done something worth while in the betterment of conditions existing in workhouses and penitentiaries throughout the United States. Students of criminology and political and social science should investigate our system of employing prison labor.